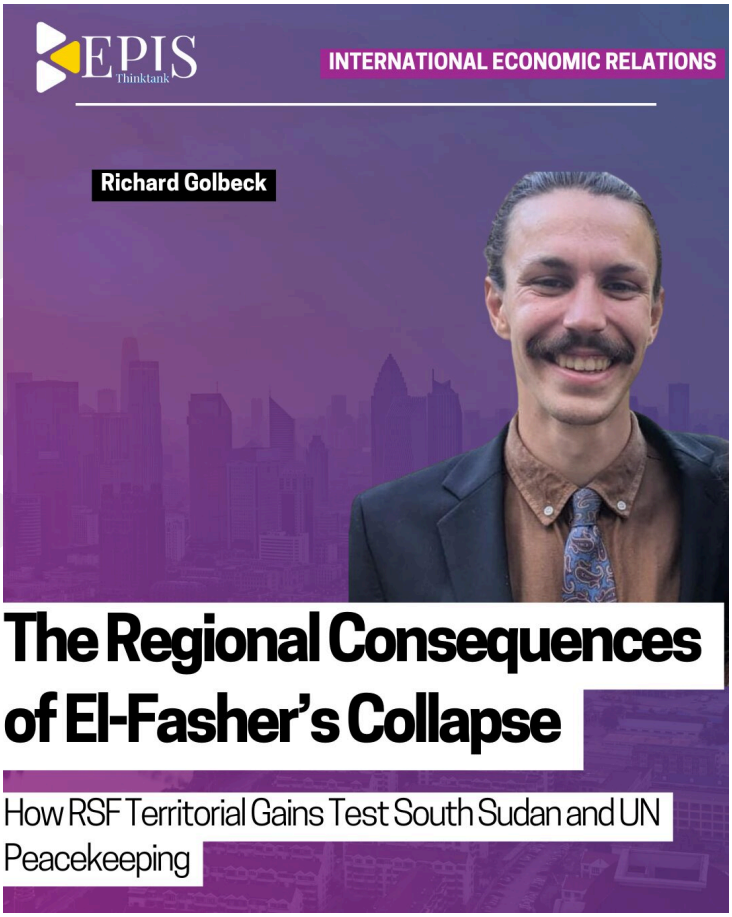
The Regional Consequences of El-Fasher's Collapse

29 DECEMBER 2025

Richard Golbeck



Sudan's Civil War

While there are many underlying reasons contributing to the ongoing civil war in Sudan, the conflict can best be understood as a contest of political legitimacy between General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, leader of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), and Mohamed 'Hemedti' Dagalo, leader of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a rebel paramilitary group, as they battle over sources of political and economic power.

As the two main pillars of the state's security apparatus, the SAF and RSF removed President Omar al-Bashir in 2019 and participated in the subse-

quent transitional government. Following the 2021 coup, tensions between the two leaders intensified, culminating in open conflict on April 15th, 2023, which rapidly escalated into a full-scale civil war (Kiros, 2024, p. 3).

El-Fasher, the regional capital of North Darfur, became a key location in the war between the RSF and the SAF, harbouring "the last remaining stronghold of the Sudanese army in the entire Darfur region" (Woldemichael, 2025). After armed groups defected to the SAF (Woldemichael, 2025), RSF forces, led by Hemedti, blockaded the regional capital on May 10th, 2024.

During the siege, civilians trapped in the city were subject to egregious human rights violations and deplorable conditions, with observers cataloguing "indiscriminate shelling" (Marangio, 2025), as well as "starvation, targeted killings, [and] sexual violence" (Marangio, 2025). On October 26th, 2025, the RSF seized control of el-Fasher after an 18-month siege, triggering a sharp escalation in violence against civilians, including arbitrary detentions and summary executions (Marangio, 2025)

South Sudan Peacekeeping

After gaining independence from Sudan in 2011, South Sudan's transitional government fractured in December 2013 due to a power struggle between President Kiir and former Vice President Machar, contributing to violence, civil society repression, and a severe humanitarian crisis (U.S. Department of State, 2018). The UN peacekeeping mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) was established shortly after secession to provide humanitarian assistance. In 2013, the Security Council expanded its military and police strength, and in 2014, the mandate was revised to prioritise civilian protection, human rights monitoring, and humanitarian support (United Nations Mission in South Sudan, 2025).

Since 2018, UNMISS has supported the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan, which created the transitional government and outlined a path towards civilian rule. Despite these efforts, the transitional period has been extended four times, implementation remains incomplete, and elections—now scheduled for 2026—have been repeatedly delayed (United Nations Mission in South Sudan, 2025).

Methodology

Employing qualitative content analysis, this report will evaluate both the impact of the fall of el-Fasher on South Sudan and UNMISS' capabilities and mandate. Through the application of peacekeeping effectiveness theory, this report will address the research question: to what extent do the capabilities and mandate of UNMISS provide the capacity to address the spillover effects from the fall of el-Fasher?

The fall of el-Fasher has the potential to further disrupt the balance of power, not only between the warring factions within Sudan but across the Greater Horn of Africa region as well. There are three particular challenges generated by the fall of el-Fasher vis-à-vis UNMISS: increased migratory

pressures, the spread of organised transboundary crime, and economic impact. For each challenge, this article will articulate first how the fall of el-Fasher has exacerbated or created the issue at hand, and second, how these developments will impact South Sudan.

The siege and eventual capture of el-Fasher resulted in the international displacement of over four million Sudanese citizens. (United Nations, 2025a) Since the start of the civil war, pressures from both internal and cross-border migration have exacerbated existing tensions and inequalities in both Sudan and South Sudan. Estimates suggest that already one million people have fled into South Sudan since the start of the siege, a number which rapidly increased as the RSF claimed control of the regional capital. According to the United Nations (2025b), 90,000 civilians have fled the region in the days following the RSF claiming control of the city, and an additional 50,000 fled from the Kordofan regions as the RSF military operations continue to sweep across the southern peripheries of the country.

The mass exodus being witnessed not only from el-Fasher but also from the broader Darfur region will pose several challenges to the already strained South Sudanese state. Notably, South Sudan already faces severe "land degradation and food insecurity" (International Crisis Group, 2025), and ongoing displacements, accelerated by the fall of el-Fasher, will put increased pressure on South Sudan's "limited capabilities to provide protection and critical life-saving assistance, including water, food, shelter, health, and core relief items" (Center for Preventive Action, 2025).

A corollary impact of RSF control over the Darfur region is the increased risk of organised transboundary crime. In late 2023, the RSF captured the cities of Zalingei and Ardamatta, the "economic and administrative hubs" (ACAPS, 2025, 1) of Central and West Darfur, respectively. Quickly, those regions' economies witnessed substantial disruptions "due to the difficulty of transporting goods from or through the conflict zones" (Siddig et al., 2023, 12). The erosion of formal economic structures in the wake of the RSF claiming control of these regions encouraged a flourishing informal cross-boundary economy based on "the smuggling of fuel, livestock, and weapons" (ACAPS, 2025, 1).

The consolidation of RSF control over the entire Darfur region risks exacerbating these patterns, resulting in the proliferation and intensification of the informal cross-boundary wartime economies. As noted by the Global Organised Crime Index (2023), South Sudan not only already possesses rampant illegal markets but also actively facilitates the spread of organised crime, with "state-embedded actors appear[ing] to be involved in all criminal markets and levels in South Sudan". The changing incentive structures resulting from the expanding informal wartime economy risk attracting more actors, and with it, conflict over lucrative illegal trade routes.

Therefore, the fall of el-Fasher risks aggravating the already tenuous situation in the border regions of South Sudan.

The consolidation of RSF control in the region additionally has the potential to exacerbate existing economic issues which have persisted throughout the course of the Sudanese civil war, most saliently, the disruption of international trade routes.

Now that most of Darfur is under RSF control, it appears that "their next target lies toward Kordofan" (Titeca, 2025), with indications that the RSF – claiming control over most of Sudan's southwest – are focusing their military attention eastward. On December 8th, Reuters (2025) reported that the RSF seized control of the Heglig oil field, and on December 15th, Sudan Independent (2025) reported that the town of Babanusa in Kordofan was seized by the RSF, "underscoring the RSF's relentless momentum just weeks after it captured the North Darfur capital of El Fasher" (Sudan Independent, 2025). By pressing the front lines of the civil war eastward, the Greater Nile Oil Pipeline – "the main pipeline carrying oil from South Sudan to ... Port Sudan" (Center for Preventive Action, 2025) – is becoming increasingly vulnerable, generating credible risk of catastrophic disruptions to South Sudan's capacity to export their crude oil, which constitutes 90% of their GDP and is largely dependent on the Greater Nile Oil Pipeline.

These developments suggest an increased likelihood of trade route disruptions between Sudan and South Sudan, which will severely truncate South Sudan's economy, placing undue stress on the transitional authorities as the country prepares for the long-awaited elections for a civilian government.

UNMISS Mandate and capabilities

Initially established in 2011 with a mandate of "consolidating peace" (United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services, 2025), the UN peacekeeping mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) focus has since shifted following the 2013 South Sudanese civil war. This shifted priority is still evident in UNMISS's current mandate, which was extended for another year in UNSC resolution 2779 (2025) and ensured the protection of civilians and the development of conflict prevention strategies for local contexts, facilitated the safe delivery of humanitarian aid, assisted in the implementation of the revitalised 2018 agreement and peace process, and provided accountability mechanisms for human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law. Accordingly, UNMISS "is authorised to use all necessary means to implement its mandate" (United Nations Security Council, 2025), the ceiling of which is stipulated as 17,000 troops, 2,013 police officers, and 88 justice and corrections advisors.

Currently, UNMISS represents the second largest active peacekeeping force in terms of troop size. Despite this, the force is struggling to contain the widespread violence in South Sudan's periphery provinces. The challenges facing UNMISS will only be magnified as the country moves towards elections, with the peacekeeping force tasked with ensuring the credibility of the elections and the subsequent adjustment from transitional to civilian government.

Findings

Several shortcomings have been identified in UNMISS' operations, including the continuing dire humanitarian crisis, increased IDP movement and immigration, and a steady rate of violence. Despite this, UNMISS has been successful in several areas, especially regarding the protection of civilians in South Sudan, but "as the country moves towards national elections in 2026, the stakes for effective protection will rise significantly" (United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services, 2025). The United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services (2025), in their review of UNMISS, suggest that success is contingent on the appropriate deployment of the limited resources available to the peacekeeping force.

Evidenced by the United Nations Geospatial Information Section (2025), UNMISS deployments – although spread out across the country – are mostly concentrated in the provinces of Upper Nile, Unity, and Western and Central Equatoria, the latter of which hosts the capital city of Juba. Currently, there exists little UNMISS presence west of the town of Aweil, leaving much of the province of Western Bahr-El-Ghazal undefended; the province is directly south of the Sudanese provinces of Darfur. Thus, it is likely that much of the migration pressures resulting from the fall of El-Fasher and the subsequent proliferation of illegal trade routes will be concentrated along the international borders along Western and Northern Bahr-El-Ghazal.

Much of UNMISS' success in regard to mitigating ongoing violence can be attributed to their capacity to "deter and reassure the local communities of their presence, (Opiyo, Iteyo, & Onkware, 2024, p. 715)", an approach contingent upon the existence of "early warning and response mechanisms which serve to warn and prevent attacks on vulnerable populations" (Opiyo et al., 2024, p. 719). Without peacekeepers in critical regions, these capabilities will be sufficiently stymied and thus inhibit the capacity to fulfill the 'protection of civilians' component of their mandate. Similarly, given the recent fears that the 2018 Revitalized Agreement may collapse, large contingents of forces will need to remain in the capital to prevent episodes of violence.

Consequently, to address such new threats, UNMISS will need to redeploy northwestward, subsequently limiting their presence in other areas either experiencing risks of communal violence or in the capital itself, both of which would jeopardize peace and security.

Although the mandate of UNMISS adequately captures the previously outlined dangers emanating from the fall of el-Fasher, it is questionable whether it possesses the capabilities to both address these threats and ensure a peaceful lead-up to the 2026 elections. In order for UNMISS to ensure the fulfilment of their mandate in this context, the number of troops must be reconsidered.

Conclusion

As argued, the fall of el-Fasher risks: increased migration to South Sudan, threatening to destabilize the state's already strained institutions; proliferation of cross-boundary organised crime, and with it, increased risk of violent competition over valuable illegal trade routes; and disruptions to South Sudan's capabilities to export crude oil, the cornerstone of their economy.

Although UNMISS represents one of the largest peacekeeping forces currently active and their mandate accommodates the issues emanating from the fall of el-Fasher, the increased pressure from these spillover effects will strain the peacekeeping force between a variety of challenging tasks. On their own, UNMISS could arguably absorb these pressures, but contextualized by the long-delayed 2026 elections, these developments suggest that UNMISS lacks the capabilities to divert their attention to these new issues while also ensuring the legal and unproblematic transition to a civilian government.

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